

Union with Christ

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[0 : 0 0] I'd like us this evening to turn to Romans chapter 6 and to look especially at the first half of the chapter down to as far as verse 14, looking not at any great depth in the details but looking at the passage as a whole as it describes some of the aspects that are true of God's justified people as they relate particularly to having a life that is no longer under the dominion of sin.

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means. How can we who died to sin still live in it?

The previous chapter has a very interesting way of setting out for us two particular lines headed up by Adam and Christ.

And in doing so, the Apostle Paul is really setting out for us on the one hand the line of humanity of which death is the head as represented in Adam and the other line of which life is the head as represented in Christ.

And when he comes to deal with these issues, one of the great concerns that Paul has in Romans 5 is to set out the superiority of Christ, the supremacy of Christ as one who has overcome what happened in Adam, what came upon us all in Adam, what we in fact were personally involved in by virtue of our covenant relationship with Adam, that is the death and the condemnation that came upon us.

[2 : 0 3] And Paul's concern is that we can see in Jesus Christ how God has dealt with that in a way that has far exceeded whatever has happened in Christ, all the more abundantly has the grace of God overcome that.

And in doing so, he's preparing the way for what you now find in chapter 6. Because he's going to deal in chapter 6 with some things that we're not going to be able to go into tonight, but especially with the whole issue of having been separated from this line of Adam and being joined on to the line of life by being joined to Christ.

One of our great Scottish theologians, Thomas Boston, wrote one of the greatest books, I think, certainly personally, that has ever been written.

It's called The Fourfold State. Its full name is Human Nature in Its Fourfold State. And in dealing with the issue of union with Christ, Boston uses an illustration.

He talks about people who lean upon Christ, as he puts it, something like you find an ivy leaning upon a tree. They lean upon Christ, he says, but they continue to grow upon their own root.

[3 : 3 6] And ivy leans upon the tree as it grows up and clings to it, but it draws all the substance for its nourishment out of its own root.

And that, says Boston, is sadly how some people are in relation to Jesus Christ. He goes on to say, They lean upon him in a way that satisfies their hopes, but their desires are elsewhere.

It's possible to lean upon Christ in a kind of formality, but continue to grow on the old root of Adam.

That is where we are if we don't have faith in Christ. Faith in Christ as it joins us to Christ.

I'm not saying that that's necessarily where union with Christ begins. You remember the Bible going further back than that into God's election and choice of his people in love.

[4 : 38] But, if you like, the impact point as faith connects with Christ, well, it's in relation to that, Paul is saying here, that we are taken by the grace of God from the old line of Adam, from the old root of Adam, if you like, and now are placed on the root that is Christ.

Think of what happens if you can use this kind of horticultural illustration. I understand at least that when roses are being grown, hybrid roses, that what happens is that the person in charge takes the shoot of the hybrid rose, and then he takes the root of a wild rose, he cuts off the wild rose just above the root, and then he splices in the shoot of the hybrid rose, which then continues to develop until it produces its wonderful flower, but it's receiving all its nourishment from the vigor and the strength of the old rose, the wild rose.

And that's helpful, I think, to understand what Paul is actually telling us is in fact the case with a Christian. When you're taken out of the line of Adam, of the root of Adam, and joined to Christ, you no longer grow on the old root of Adam.

We'll refer to that somewhat later tonight. You now grow on the vigorous, life-giving root that is Jesus Christ, and the life that God has provided in him for his people.

And it's in relation to that that Paul is saying that the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.

[6 : 33] You see, part of coming to know where we are in relation to our sin is to realize our lostness. We come to realize our lostness when the law of God highlights sin for us.

And what he's saying, therefore, is when the law came in, when the law of God enters the situation, it doesn't do away with a sense of sin. It intensifies it.

It doesn't even do away with sinning. It actually causes us to react in such a way, prior to being saved, that we increase the trespass.

But where sin abounded, grace all the more abounded. So you see, the question is then quite logical in that sense.

Shall we then go on in sin that grace may abound? Shall we, who have been taken off the old root of Adam, who have found by the entrance of God's law that sin abounds, so grace all the more abounds, is it not logical to say then that it's better for us to go on in sin so that then we'll receive more grace?

[7 : 45] Well, it may be logical in one sense of it, but it's forgetting one thing. And that is that union with Christ does more than lead to justification.

Faith in Christ is the means, certainly, by which God brings justification into the life and the person, the relationship he has with his people.

We are justified by faith in Christ. But union with Christ in which that faith exists is joined also to sanctification.

from the same moment as justification is. And it means that grace not only deals with the guilt of sin to superabound over and above the law and sin.

It means also that grace deals with the power of sin and ultimately with its presence. That's really what the passage now is going to deal with.

[8 : 51] Our union with Christ and how it enables us to deal with sin, with the sin that still remains in the life of those who are in Christ.

The sin that you and I know of every day. And there are three things in the passage that we can briefly look at. First of all, our union with Christ is something that's taught by our baptism.

Notice what he's saying. How can we who died to sin live any longer in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

Now some Christians will pass over this kind of passage and say that's too deep for me. There's too much of a complex theology going on in there so I'll just skim over that until I get to an easier.

[9 : 54] But that's really not how we grow in grace and in the knowledge and in the strength of Christ by doing so. And I'm sure that's not your own intention tonight as you come to that sort of passage in the Bible.

Because this is absolutely crucial to our understanding of what a Christian is and what it means to live the Christian life. You cannot live the Christian life by just stepping over sin, passing, acknowledging an acknowledgement to it that it's there but not actually really getting down to the issues in which you have to tackle that sin and overcome that sin and deal with it on a daily basis.

So Paul is saying this is how the Christian life is. Far from going on in sin that grace may abound, we cannot because we died to it.

And how do you see that you died to it? How is that explained? Well, it's in terms of baptism. And you know, sometimes, not just sometimes but very often it's the case with myself as much as anybody else that I really fail to sit down and ask myself Now, what does my baptism really mean?

What is my baptism about? What do I see in my baptism that helps me in my understanding of what I need to be as a Christian?

[11 : 25] We think about baptism when we see it administered. And perhaps that's as much as we think about it till the next time it's administered. But if you look back into your catechisms, confessions, larger catechisms and so on, these great Christians of those times, these people who put that together, will say to us, it is your daily business and privilege to be improving your baptism.

That's to say, to be thinking about what it means, to be living out what it signifies, to be in reality what your baptism represents. And what does it represent?

Well, the catechism really helps us greatly in summarizing it for us. It is a sacrament in which the washing of water by the word signifies and seals three things.

Our ingrafting into Christ. Union with Christ. Think about the rose and the old dog rose, the wild rose, the ingrafting of the hybrid, the shoot into the root from which it then continues to grow from then on.

This is what the catechism is saying. Our baptism signifies and seals to us our ingrafting into Christ, as well as the second thing, our partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace.

[12 : 50] And the third thing, our engagement to be the Lord's. What does my baptism signify to me? What should my baptism be telling me every day? What sort of life does my baptism actually constrain me to live?

It is one in which I think of the issues of being joined to Christ, being ingrafted to Christ. And why am I ingrafted to Christ?

So that I can understand that I'm committed to a life against sin. So that I can understand that I actually died to sin.

Now it's a bit complex, but just think of what the apostle is saying here. When you are joined to Christ, when your baptism represents you ingrafted into Christ, you're not just joined to Christ in a general way to the person of Christ.

So that you think of the figure of Christ or the person of Christ, and you say, I'm joined to him, and I don't need to think more deeply about it. What Paul is saying is, because you're joined to Christ, you're joined to every aspect of his work.

[14 : 02] You are joined to him in his death. You are joined to him in his burial. You are joined to him in his resurrection from the dead. You are joined to him in his exaltation.

You are joined to him even in the coming with which he's going to be yet seen in the world. The Christian is united to Christ in these aspects.

That's what he's saying. We were baptized into his death. We were buried with him by baptism into death in order that like as he was raised, so we too might walk in newness of life.

In other words, you think of your baptism, you ask, what does it mean? It means that I'm joined to Christ. That's what it represents, that word should mean for me. And if I'm not yet living by faith in Christ, then I've got to actually say to myself, but I'm not what my baptism signifies, so I've got to come to Christ and I've got to put my trust in him and I've got to believe in him so that I will be in reality what my baptism sets out for me.

But if I am joined to Christ by faith, well, I'm joined to his death and his burial and his resurrection. In other words, I'm joined to him as the one who came through death into resurrection life and therefore I live in him.

[15 : 35] You see, he's saying, just as Christ was raised from the dead, so we too, by virtue of our union with him, walk in newness of life.

Secondly, your union with Christ is a union that involves freedom from sin. He's beginning to say that already at the beginning of the chapter, but he says, if we have been united with him in a death like his or in the likeness of his death, we shall certainly be in the likeness of his resurrection.

We know that our old self or our old man was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing so that we should no longer be enslaved to sin.

For the one who has died has been set free or delivered from sin. Now, if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him, and so on.

Paul uses, very often in his writings, the idea or the image of sin being a great dictator or a tyrant. A tyrant who keeps slaves, and that's you and I, because the dominion of sin is an enslaving dominion, and it is grace that breaks us away from that enslaving dominion of sin.

[17 : 04] That's what he's saying in the chapter here, that we are under this tyrant until God in Christ takes us out from that. We're growing on the old root of Adam, and in doing so, we are under the tyranny of sin.

But then what happens when God comes to work savingly in the life of any person? Well, it's put here in terms of dying to sin and being alive to God.

Now, what does he mean here that we died to sin? As he says in verse 2 in the chapter, how shall we who died to sin live any longer? Therein, the first thing to say is that died to sin is a better translation than that we are dead to sin.

Because that can certainly nowadays give the wrong impression. You say you're dead to something, it means it doesn't bother you, or you're not bothered by it. If you take it in that sense of it being dead to sin, you might imagine, as some people have imagined, as some Christians have indeed believed down through the years that sin really doesn't bother them anymore.

In fact, that they might even at some times be perfect. Well, if a Christian is somebody who is not in the least bothered with sin anymore, then I'm not a Christian.

- [18 : 32] Neither was Paul a Christian. because this man is saying that we died to sin, but that doesn't mean that we have no longer any sense of sin, or any knowledge of sin, or any attraction towards sin.

What he's saying by saying we died to sin is really explained, I think, when you see what he says at the end of verse 6, the second part of verse 6, and also verse 9.

That the body of sin might be brought to nothing so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. And at the end of verse 9, he speaks about death no longer having dominion over Christ.

Dying to sin, being in a situation where you died to sin, is essentially being brought out from under the control and the dominion and the power in a controlling sense of sin in your life.

That's what was the case. But in Jesus Christ and by the power of Christ, you died to sin. You were brought out from under its dominion.

- [19 : 46] You are not controlled by sin. The tyrant's hold has been broken. You are no longer growing on that old root of Adam. You died to that.

You were separated from that. You were cut off from that and joined to Christ and joined to life and joined to power over sin.

Even though there is, as we'll see in a minute, still some sin left in your life. And that's why he's saying here, we know that our old self was crucified with him.

Our old man was crucified with him. And this is a, I know, a theological point that's been debated many, many a time down through the generations. But what he's saying is, remember he's talking about an analogy between Christ and the Christian.

And he's saying, as it was in Christ's life, so it is in the life of the Christian. As Christ died to sin, in the sense that he died, was buried, rose from the dead, that was an end of sin for him.

- [20 : 56] No more connection with sin. So, he says, you see, that is a pattern for your own lives. You are connected with him in his death, burial, resurrection, so you died to sin, to its power, to its control, to its dominance.

That old self was crucified with him. You don't think of Christ now being crucified anymore. The crucifying is over.

It's gone. It's in the past. And when he's using that word of our old self, our old man, he means exactly the same thing as in reference to Christ.

Our old man was crucified with him. What is that old man, that old self? Well, put it this way, I had two lives.

One's in the past, the other is the one I now have. There was a James McKeever who no longer lives.

- [22 : 06] That's the old, unregenerate, unsaved, unjoined to Christ old person. that person is gone.

This is the new man. This is the man joined now to the root of Christ. The old self, the old man was crucified with him.

It doesn't mean there's no longer any sin in the life of James McKeever, but the sin that's there that I need to fight with every day, it's not the old man that's there, it's sin in the new man.

Our old man was crucified with him in order that the body of sin, and I can't have time to go into the gist of that really in any detail, but take it again that it's primarily something to do with the, if you like, the dominance of sin, the control of sin, this tyrant grip of sin, that is something which in union with Christ has been brought to be defeated so that we should no longer be enslaved to it.

Union with Christ means I've died to sin. I have died because I am a new creation, a new person. The old man was crucified with him.

[23 : 41] The sin that I still have is sin in the new man, that the old man itself is gone. I'm no longer unregenerate, united to the root of Adam, man.

I am regenerate, united to the root of Christ, man. That is the new man. God and it's a wonderful way that Paul deals with it because he uses language that's taking us back really to the idea of being dismissed by a judge.

He's saying here in verses 6 and 7, one who has died has been set free from sin. If we died to sin, if we're alive in Christ, if we're united to him in his life, then what he's saying is the charge against us has been completely dismissed.

You think about what justification is and think about how this sanctification is tied inseparably to it. It's there at the same point, it begins at that same point.

Here you are in a courthouse, you're before the judge, you know you're guilty, you've confessed your guilt and the judge is about to pronounce sentence and you expect rightly that that sentence will be that you're banished from the judge forever because that's what you deserve.

[25 : 12] And the judge says I'm not yet going to pronounce sentence because I'm going to ask my son to come in and take your place. So his son comes in the side door of the courtroom, goes into the dock, takes your place, tells you to leave.

And the judge says, your guilt he's now taking and his righteousness will become yours.

The charges against you are dismissed. You are righteous. And you can go on from that, use the illustration if you like to go further.

The judge doesn't just dismiss the guilty person, God dismissing the sinner and saying, you are now righteous, you're free to go. No, he says, you're going to come home and live with me from now on.

You're going to be my son. You're going to be one in my family. I'm going to adopt you. These are the wonderful truths that Paul deals with, that the New Testament deals with, the Bible tells us about in what it means to be joined to Christ.

[26 : 19] Justified, sanctified, being sanctified, and adopted by God. How can we who died to sin live any longer than sin really has no place in the life of these children of God, so they work at it every day to overcome it.

They died to it in principle. They died to it in that their old self was crucified with Christ. But now, as we'll see in a minute, they have to work at not giving their members of their bodies as instruments for unrighteousness, but righteousness.

But not only did they die to sin, they are alive to God. So, he says in verse 11, you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God.

Now, this is one of the great problems that Christians often find themselves facing. It's a problem of the mind, it's a problem in a sense of the understanding as well.

People will say so often, I have so much sin still in my life, I'm still so conscious of sin, how can I be a Christian? And the devil will come and persuade you, you're not a Christian because you've still got that sin in your life, or because some sin that you thought you'd overcome is back in your life, and it's back with power, and it's there again, and you've got to get down to dealing with it again, and you're disappointed, and you're discouraged, and perhaps you're in near despair, and you're saying, how can this possibly be the life of a Christian?

[27 : 58] Well, that's confusing, the two things that we've been saying here. You might think that it means the body of sin has not been destroyed, that the old self, the old man has not been crucified.

It's not that. there is still sin in the life of God's people. You are alive, even though there is still sin to contend with.

And that's what Paul is saying to us here. So you must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God. Yes, there's sin in your life, but it's not controlling you.

You're not uneasy about it the way you used to be in the old self. It's something that you know you must and you want to get rid of from your life.

If not, then you've got a problem. Then you can ask yourself, am I really a Christian? But the fact that there's sin there, the presence of sin there, the fight against sin especially there, doesn't mean you're not a Christian, it means the opposite.

[29 : 05] That's what a Christian life is. We are to consider ourselves, reckon yourselves, think about it, he's saying, if you're joined to Christ, if your faith is in him, if your trust is in him, this is what is true of you.

You're dead to sin and alive to God. A lot of people have a problem thinking of coming to the Lord's table because of sin. And it is a problem.

It's something in our minds that we have as a kind of barrier to coming to profess the Lord. I'm not talking about unrepented of sin. I'm not talking about sin that we know is there but we haven't bothered to do anything about.

It's rather sin in the consciousness of someone who really hates that sin. It's sin in the consciousness of a person who is fighting with that sin, who wants desperately the grace of God to overcome that sin, to have that sin more and more dealt with.

Paul is telling us here, if that's what you like, then that's what the Lord's table is for. It's a means of grace. It's a means of nourishment.

[30 : 24] It's a means of strength in your further ongoing fight with that sin. Not for the careless. It's not for the negligent.

It's not for people who don't bother with sin, but it is for those who are alive to God in Christ Jesus, who died to sin and who still know the daily battle with sin that goes on.

Reckon yourselves dead to sin and alive to God. And the third thing in this union with Christ, not only is it taught in our baptism if we look into it and see what it's what's signified there for us.

Secondly, it's something which involves this deliverance, this freedom from the dominance, the control, the tyranny of sin. And thirdly, it's something that joins us to a holy life or to leading a holy life.

You see how he concludes the passage from verse 12. Let not sin, therefore, reign in your mortal bodies. sin. You see, he's still acknowledging the fact that there is sin there, active sin, actively working sin.

[31 : 44] And when sin is there, it's not the old man who's still alive. It's the flesh, as Paul calls it elsewhere, contending against the spirit.

And the flesh, as the flesh revives sin and brings sin to be stirred up and to be enacted and sometimes to appear so attractive.

So Paul is saying, therefore, let not sin reign. Why is he saying therefore? Well, it's a word which means on the basis of what I've just said, he's saying, therefore, seeing you are joined to Christ and joined to life and growing from his root, therefore, let not sin reign in your mortal bodies.

In other words, living a holy life is not working towards your freedom. It's not a matter of working towards a freedom that will be used one day. Living a holy life is someone who is already free, free from the dominance of sin in Christ, living in such a way that seeks daily to overcome it and to contend against it and to mortify it.

Big difference. It's the life of the free in Christ that Paul is describing. But you see, he's saying, this is the consequence of being joined to Christ.

[33 : 13] This is what you must attend to. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies to obey, make you obey their passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.

For sin will have no dominion over you since you are not under the law but under grace. He's used that same word of Christ, dominion over you, dominion over him.

Death no longer has dominion over him. dominion. That's itself a thought we've not gone into but what a thought it is.

Because in the language of the New Testament, that word dominion or to have dominion really means to lord it over someone.

And isn't there a profound thought that the Son of God willingly put himself in the place where death for a time lorded it over him.

[34 : 26] I know there's a sense in which the Lord is always the Lord of death. Nevertheless, we have to take account of the fact that he really did die the death we deserve.

That he really was buried. His body was laid in the sepulchre. If you go to John's gospel, very interesting, he doesn't say there they laid the body of Jesus.

John says, remember John is the theologian of this profound sonship of Christ? There he says, they laid Jesus.

He was buried. The Son of God was buried. The Son of God actually came to put himself there.

death. But it's saying here, death has no more dominion over him. And so it is for his people as well. Joined to him by faith.

[35 : 29] Sin will not have dominion over you. You're not under the law but under grace. What therefore? Therefore, let not sin reign in your mortal bodies. Don't present.

And he means by that your members. He means all our faculties. He means all our bodily faculties and all our mental faculties.

Our eyes, our ears, what we watch, what we read, how we speak, what we listen to. We're not to present them as instruments for unrighteousness to use.

That's as if we were back under the dominance of the old tyrant. They're not for him anymore. therefore, our Lord, therefore his use, therefore his glory, therefore his honor.

And he's given us the Lord's supper as a memorial to him in his death, as a means of grace to help us having died to sin, that we should therefore no longer present our members to sin, to unrighteousness, but rather to himself.

[36 : 49] Maybe I can just finish with an illustration which might help bring all what we've said together. Imagine that you had or have a really old wreck of a car.

Young people nowadays don't have these like they did in my young day, but even in my early married life, that's the kind of car I had, I had no option. And it comes to the point, just imagine you've got that sort of car and you're forever patching it up, you're trying to keep up with the rust, the brakes are constantly failing, it doesn't start in the morning, you've got a jump start at you, a whole lot of things that really make you so fed up with this car and you say, well, one of these days, when you can afford it, you change it for a new model, same make but a new model.

And you're no longer in the old model, you're now sitting and driving the new model. A lot has changed, let's just imagine that it's, as most cars are now, reliable, starts first time, there's no rust to keep up with, no problems with the brakes, it's working superbly.

But you're driving along the road one day and sometimes the thought hits you, well, I don't think the seats in this one are actually as comfortable as my old car. And just for a moment you get a hankering that perhaps there were some things about the old one that was better.

Well, that's something I think that helps us to understand this great transition from the line of Adam to the line of Christ. The old car is gone. when God brought us face to face with our sin and the problems and the troubles and all the things that are associated with sin, how glad we were to be rid of it, to die to it.

[38 : 47] We died to that. Yes, there are still some times that sin operates in our lives and glimpses of the old car come back and perhaps a hankering here and there for things from the past.

But ask me the question, do I want the old car back? Not on your life. I'm glad it's gone.

I much prefer the new one. Thank you very much. That's what I'm like if I'm a Christian the way I should be. That's how I'm viewing sin if I'm a Christian the way I should be.

That's what I think of union with Christ if I'm living the way I should be. Someone who died to sin and is alive to God.

Someone who's no longer connected with the old root of Adam but now lives with the new root of Christ daily feeding nourishment into my soul.

[40 : 01] let's pray. Lord our gracious God we give thanks for the work of your grace and for the way in which your grace operates to bring us from death to life.

for the way that you bring to us in your word such teaching in regard to that work that we may admire it and that we may ourselves be all the more concerned to live for your glory.

Bless us now then we pray and forgive our sin for Christ's sake. Amen.